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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to contrast the news coverage of developed and developing nations, and of the United States specifically, as transmitted to Asia by the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI). A total of 556 AP reports and 453 UPI reports drawn from a 6-week period were coded for more than 100 variables and 47 topics. The results indicated that more news reports were based in the United States than any other single country, but they accounted for only 23% of the total. Countries with the next greatest number of reports were the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the Third World nations of Iran, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, and India. By region, Asia had the greatest number of reports. The average length of the reports located in the Third World was greater than that of reports from the developed countries or the United States alone. The largest subject category was political news, and reports from the United States and Western Europe dominated the economic news. However, Asia accounted for more reports of international trade agreements and the largest proportion of stories on capital investment and stock issues and industrial projects. Asia was second only to North America as the location of reports on scientific, technical, and medical topics. More than half of the reports of natural disasters were located not in the Third World, but in the United States. These findings suggest that there is only some truth to the New World Information Order claims that Western news sources are biased against developing nations. (HTH)

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# Coverage of Developed and Developing Nations in American Wire Services to Asia

C. Anthony Giffard

One of the persistent themes of proponents of a New International Information Order is that the major international news agencies project a negative image of developing countries of the Third World, while emphasizing the positive in their coverage of the industrialized nations, and particularly of the countries in which they are based. There have been a number of studies of the coverage of Third World countries in the media of Western nations, and of the foreign news transmitted abroad by Western news agencies. But little has been done by way of comparison of the quantity and quality of news of developed and developing nations disseminated abroad by these agencies. The object of this study is to contrast the news coverage of developed and developing nations, and of the United States specifically, as transmitted to Asia by the Associated Press and United Press International.

## Background

It has virtually become a matter of dogma among critics of the existing information dispensation that the major news agencies focus almost exclusively on unfavorable news -- the "coups and earthquakes" -- of the Third World, while presenting a positive image of the West. Thus Mustapha Masmoudi, in his seminal paper on "The New World Information Order," deplores the lack of information on developing countries in the transnational media, and asserts that when the media

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do indeed show an interest in them, they do so "in the most unfavorable light, stressing crises, strikes, street demonstrations, putches, etc., or even holding them up to ridicule." The criteria governing selection of news, says Masmoudi, are "based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system and of the world in which the system is established."

A monograph on "The World of News Agencies" prepared for the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (McBride Commission), concludes that "in general terms the Third World and actors in the Third World are presented sketchily, particularly in comparison with Western areas of the world and Western actors."

One member of the commission, Gamal El-Oteifi of Egypt, noted that the developing countries are especially critical of the international press agencies "because they do not provide sufficient coverage of events that take place outside the Western world, and only present events in the Third World that are sensational or exotic, or that tend to undermine the developing countries." The information disseminated by these media, says El-Oteifi, "exaggerates the role of industrialized countries and minimizes the increasingly significant role of the Third World."

According to the report of the McBride Commission, more serious still is that "it is this false image, harmful to their inner balance, which is presented to the developing countries themselves." The major news agencies, in short, stand accused of ethnocentricism, of emphasizing differences between societies, and of evaluating Third World countries in terms of Western values.

## Research Questions

The study comprised a content analysis of the AP and UPI wire services to Asia over a six-week period in 1980 to address these questions:

1. The relative frequency in the Asia wire services of stories about developing countries, about the industrialized nations, and about the home base of the two agencies, the United States itself.
2. The differences in the length of reports on the Asia wire services about developing countries, developed countries and the United States.
3. The differences in subject matter of reports from more and less-developed countries, and from the United States.

## Related Studies

A number of quantitative studies have examined foreign news in national media, the most ambitions being the recent "Foreign Images" study undertaken by the International Association for Mass Communications Research for Unesco. Several studies have looked at the coverage of foreign news in wire services distributed in Western countries, particularly the United States.

More directly relevant to the present study is a major project undertaken by Wilbur Schramm et. al. that examined international news wire service to Asia for five days in 1977. The study focussed primarily on news about the Third World carried by the Asia wires of AP, UPI, Reuters and Agence France-Presse. The study concluded, inter alia, that "it is clear that the international wire services are

delivering rather more Third World news to their clients in Asia than had been the general opinion."

Equally relevant is a recent analysis of selected services of the AP, UPI, Reuters and AFP undertaken by scholars at Indiana University and the University of North Carolina. Using methodology similar to that of the IAMCR project, the study examined the AP and UPI wires to smaller media in the United States; the AP, UPI, AFP and Reuters wires to Latin America; the Reuters wire to the Middle East and the AFP wire to Francophone Africa. The analysis demonstrates a more even balance of coverage between developed and developing nations than claimed by critics of the major agencies. But it also calls for a re-evaluation of "the definition of news that seems to dominate much wire-service coverage." The present study is intended to be comparable with the Latin American wire service portion of this project.

## Method

The study instrument was a standardized content analysis protocol used in the IAMCR survey of foreign news in the media of 29 countries. The scheme was developed by Paul Hartmann at the University of Leicester, based on a pilot scheme worked out by Markku Salomaa and Kaarle Nordenstreng at the University of Tampere in Finland. This scheme was adopted so as to make the present study comparable also to those conducted by Richard Cole, Donald L. Shaw and Robert L. Stevenson at the University of North Carolina, and by David Weaver and Cleveland Wilhoit at the University of Indiana.

Samples: The study used AP and UPI Asia wire service copy drawn from a six-week period in the summer of 1980. The sample comprised a constructed week of seven randomly selected days. Each day of the week was represented, with the same dates selected for each wire service. Every third news item of each day's run was included in the sample. This yielded a total of 1009 reports, 556 from AP and 453 from UPI.

Categories: Stories were coded for more than 100 variables. These included the length and type of story, its location and the topics and themes covered. Each story was coded as having one main topic and up to three subsidiary topics. The 47 possible topics included international and domestic politics, military and defense, economic matters, international aid, social services, crime and judicial matters, culture, religion, science, sports and ecology.

Coder reliability: Fifteen stories chosen at random from the larger sample were processed by eight coders, all graduate or senior students in an international communications seminar. Reliability for such simple choices as story location and length approached 100 percent. For more complex judgments on topics and themes the agreement exceeded 70 percent. In addition, the principal investigator regularly checked each coder's output to ensure uniformity of interpretation.

Level of development: the 101 countries represented in the sample reports were divided into three categories to compare the coverage of more and less-developed countries. In order to ensure comparability with the Indiana/North Carolina benchmark studies, the same criteria were used in allocating countries to specific categories. The more-developed category includes the nations of Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, but does not

include the United States, which is considered a separate category. The less-developed countries comprise Africa (except South Africa); Asia (except Japan); and South America. Also included in this group are Israel and Turkey (following the benchmark studies) because of their concern with developmental issues. The United States was treated as a separate category for the purposes of this study because of the hypothesis that national agencies like AP and UPI would give a different kind of coverage not only to developed and developing countries generally, but to their host nation specifically.

Region: The countries were further subdivided into eight regions: North America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

## Findings

More news reports were indeed sourced in the United States than any other single country (Table 1). But these reports comprised less than one quarter of the total (23 percent). Other individual countries that accounted for the greatest number of stories were, in order, the U.S.S.R (15 percent), the United Kingdom (10 percent), and Japan (8 percent). But of the 156 news reports from the U.S.S.R., 131 concerned international sports -- the Moscow Summer Olympics were in progress at the time, and most of these were brief reports of results of different events. If these stories are excluded, the Soviet Union drops to sixth place.

The next five places were occupied by Third World nations. Iran was in fifth place -- largely because of the hostage crisis -- followed by the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Malaysia

and India. Altogether 47 developing countries featured as the location of reports, compared to 25 developed nations.

Stories from more-developed countries, including the United States, represented two-thirds of the total number of reports (Table 2). Reports from the United States alone comprised 23 percent -- a figure very similar to that found by Weaver et al. in their study of Latin American wires. Less-developed countries accounted for 31 percent of the total.

Regional distribution: When countries are categorized by region, the biggest single category comprises news reports from Asia (25 percent). Nearly a third of the Asian stories come from Japan. North American stories account for 24 percent of the total, and Western European reports for 20 percent. Of the Western European total, sightly more than half originated in the United Kingdom. The figure for Eastern Europe is 17 percent, with more than three-quarters of those stories located in the Soviet Union. If the reports relating to the Olympic Games were excluded, this regions's share would drop to about 4 percent.

Third World regions other than Asia have only token representation. The Mideast accounted for 6 percent, largely because of the hostage crisis in Iran. Africa and Latin America between them provided only six percent of the stories. Although the Asia wires also serve Australia and New Zealand, less then 2 percent of the news items emanated from those countries. The fact that reports originating in Asia comprise the largest single regional category supports the Weaver et al. finding that that Western wire services going into other regions concentrate on foreign news about the countries to which they are directed.

## Notes

1. Mustapha Masmoudi, "The New World Information Order," (Unesco, 1978).

2. G. El-Oteifi, "Call for a New International Information Order: Preliminary Remarks," (Unesco, 1978).

3. Sean McBride, Many Voices, One World, (Unesco, 1980), p. 37.

4. Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, et al., The World of the News: The News of the World, (London, 1980).

5. For an annotated bibliography of several recent studies, see Robert L. Stevenson, "Other Research and the World of the News," in Sreberny-Mohammadi, op cit.

6. Wilbur Schramm, "Circulation of News in the Third World: A Study of Asia," in G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Harold de Bock (eds.) Mass Communication Review Yearbook (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980).

7. David H. Weaver, et al., "The News of the World in Four Major Wire Services," in Sreberny-Mohammadi, op cit.

8. Ibid.

Length of Reports: The average length of the reports located in the Third World was greater than that of reports from the developed countries or the United States alone (Table 4). This was particularly true of the Associated Press wire, whose reports on developing countries were about 25 percent longer, on average, than those from the industrialized world. The longest reports, on average, came from Latin America, the Middle East and Asia -- areas that also had the lowest number of reports. The relatively few stories that did come from those regions, it seems, were more substantial than the average report from the developed areas.

Kinds of news: The comparison of subject matter is based on a combination of the main topic and up to three subsidiary topics in each news report. Differences between the more developed and the less developed countries are significant to the .05 level and beyond as measured by the chi-square test.

The largest general category comprised political news, and specifically diplomatic and political activity between states. More than 40 percent of all reports included national or international politics as a topic. Sports, and news of sports personalities both national and international, was the second largest category -- again mainly as a result of the Olympic Games. Economic matters generally were in third position, followed by military and defense issues. Other categories were small by comparison.

Within these general categories there was considerable variation. Reports of diplomatic and political activity between states comprised a far higher proportion of news from less-developed countries than from the industrialized nations, or from the United States alone. Of

all the reports relating to internal conflict, two-thirds were located in developing nations. These reports comprised 27 percent of the news of developing countries, and only six percent of the news from the more-developed nations. This pattern was even more marked in the case of stories relating to armed conflict. Nearly 25 percent of all reports from the Third World had this as a topic, compared to three percent for the developed world. Almost 80 percent of all reports of armed conflict emanated from the Third World.

Most international sports news was sourced in the developed countries, with the Moscow Olympics accounting for 70 percent. Another 15 percent of international sports reports came from Western Europe. Non-international sports news was dominated by the United States, with nearly 80 percent of the total -- primarily American baseball scores. American and East European athletes were the most frequently mentioned sports personalities.

Reports from the United States and Western Europe dominated the general category of economic matters, particularly stock exchange prices, monetary questions and exchange rates. But there were more reports of international trade agreements from Asia than from any other region. Asia also accounted for the largest proportion of stories on capital investment and stock issues, and on industrial projects. Other Third World regions were rarely mentioned in this context.

There were other surprises. Asia was second only to North America as the location of reports on scientific, technical and medical topics. And more than half the reports on natural disasters were located not in the Third World, but in North America -- the eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington State.

## Conclusions

These findings suggest that there is some truth in the claims that the news Third World regions receive from the American wire services is biased towards the West. But this is not to say that the agencies are ignoring news of developing countries, or that they news they do disseminate is overwhelmingly negative. There is more Asian news on the Asia wire services of the two American agencies than news of any other region. And while the proportion of reports from developing countries as a whole is only one-third of the total, the absolute number is substantial. As Schramm and Weaver point out, there is more news of the Third World available on the wires than is used by the media in the developing countries they serve.

Reports from the developing nations were, on average, longer than those from developed countries, possibly contradicting the notion that Third World events are covered only sketchily by comparison with those of the West. Nor can the charges of ethnocentricism really be substantiated. Although the United States, as the home base of the agencies studied, is the location of more reports than any other country, these comprise less than a quarter of the total. With the exception of the emphasis given to American sports, there is no significant difference in the coverage of news located in the United States and that from other developed countries.

The findings support the conclusions of the IAMCR "Foreign Images" study, and the Weaver *et al.* wire service study that "international wire service reporting equals politics." Political or

military matters comprise the bulk of the reportage, with comparatively little attention being devoted to social services, religion, culture or science.

There is indeed a qualitative difference in coverage of the more-developed and less-developed nations. The composite portrait of the developing countries that emerges depicts them as being relatively more prone to internal conflicts and crises; more likely to be the setting of armed conflict; more frequently the recipients of disaster relief, or economic and military aid; and more often the location of criminal activities. This does not mean that the developed nations are portrayed as being immune to these afflictions. For the most part the same categories of news dominate the coverage of the industrialized world. The difference is that other kinds of news help leaven the mix.

Table 1

| Location of Story | Less developed countries | Location of Story | More developed countries |
|---|---|---|---|
| AFGHANISTAN | 11(3.6%) | AUSTRALIA | 14(3.1%) |
| ANGOLA | 1(0.3%) | AUSTRIA | 3(0.7%) |
| ARGENTINA | 4(1.3%) | BELGIUM | 7(1.5%) |
| BANGLADESH | 2(0.7%) | CANADA | 9(2.0%) |
| BOLIVIA | 4(1.3%) | CYPRUS | 1(0.2%) |
| BOTSWANA | 2(0.7%) | CZECHOSLAVAKIA | 1(0.2%) |
| BRAZIL | 9(3.0%) | DENMARK, SWEDEN,NORWAY | 9(2.0%) |
| BURMA | 1(0.3%) | FRANCE | 15(3.3%) |
| PEOPLE | 25(8.2%) | GERMAN FEDERAL REPUB | 13(2.9%) |
| CUBA | 1(0.3%) | GREECE | 2(0.4%) |
| DEM. KAMPUCHIA | 3(1.0%) | HUNGARY | 1(0.2%) |
| ECUADOR | 1(0.3%) | ITALY | 10(2.2%) |
| EGYPT | 18(5.9%) | JAPAN | 79(17.3%) |
| EL SALVADOR | 3(1.0%) | NETHERLANDS | 3(0.7%) |
| ETHIOPIA | 1(0.3%) | NEW ZEALAND | 1(0.2%) |
| MAURITIUS | 2(0.7%) | POLAND | 3(0.7%) |
| INDIA | 18(5.9%) | PORTUGAL | 5(1.1%) |
| INDONESIA | 4(1.3%) | ROMANIA | 3(0.7%) |
| IRAN | 27(8.9%) | SOUTH AFRICA | 7(1.5%) |
| IRAQ | 2(0.7%) | SPAIN | 8(1.8%) |
| ISRAEL | 15(4.9%) | SWITZERLAND | 4(0.9%) |
| JAMAICA | 1(0.3%) | USSR | 156(34.2%) |
| KUWAIT | 3(1.0%) | UNITED KINGDOM | 102(22.4%) |
| LEBANON | 9(3.0%) | | |
| LIBERIA | 2(0.7%) | | |
| MALAYSIA | 18(5.9%) | | |
| MEXICO | 3(1.0%) | | |
| MOROCCO | 1(0.3%) | | |
| NEPAL | 1(0.3%) | | |
| NICARAGUA | 1(0.3%) | | |
| NIGERIA | 1(0.3%) | | |
| PAKISTAN | 3(1.0%) | | |
| PARAGUAY | 1(0.3%) | | |
| PHILIPPINES | 19(6.3%) | | |
| SAUDI ARABIA | 2(0.7%) | | |
| SIERRA LEONE | 1(0.3%) | | |
| SINGAPORE | 10(3.3%) | | |
| SRI LANKA | 2(0.7%) | | |
| HONG KONG | 16(5.3%) | | |
| SYRIA | 2(0.7%) | | |
| TAIWAN | 3(1.0%) | | |
| THAILAND | 25(8.2%) | | |
| TURKEY | 11(3.6%) | | |
| UNITED ARAB EMIRATES | 2(0.7%) | | |
| VIETNAM | 2(0.7%) | | |
| ZIMBABWE | 5(1.6%) | | |
| SOUTH KOREA | 6(2.0%) | | |

Table 2

Comparison of AP and UPI Asia Wire Coverage

Number of Stories

| Number of Stories from: | Less-Developed | More Developed | U.S. Only | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AP | 153(28%) | 252(47%) | 137(25%) | 542(55%) |
| UPI | 150(34%) | 203(45%) | 94(21%) | 447(45%) |
| TOTAL | 303(31%) | 455(46%) | 231(23%) | 989(100%) |

CHI SQUARE = 4.22, 2df. Significance = .1210

Table 3

Comparison of AP and UPI wire coverage
Number of stories by region (percent)

| | North America | Western Europe | Eastern Europe | Oceania | Latin America | Asia | Africa | Mideast |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of stories from: | | | | | | | | |
| AP | 27% | 18% | 21% | 0.2% | 3% | 23% | 4% | 5% |
| UPI | 22 | 22 | 12% | 3 | 3 | 28 | 4 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 24 | 20 | 17 | 2 | 3 | 25 | 4 | 6 |

Table 4

Comparison of AP and UPI Asia Wire Coverage

Average Length of Stories in Words

| Average Length of Stories of: | Less-Developed | More-Developed | U.S.A. Only |
|---|---|---|---|
| AP | 247 | 192 | 196 |
| UPI | 255 | 221 | 240 |
| TOTAL | 251 | 203 | 214 |

Table 5

| Topics of Wire Service Stories | Percent of stories from less developed countries (n = 303) | Percent of stories from more developed countries (n = 455) | Percent of stories from the U.S.A. (n = 231) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Politics** | | | |
| 1. Diplomatic/political activity between states | 40.0 | 15.0 | 11.0 |
| 2. Internal conflict or crisis | 27.0 | 6.0 | 6.1 |
| 3. Elections, campaigns, appointments, government changes | 8.5 | 3.0 | 6.5 |
| 4. Other political, including legislation | 3.6 | 1.5 | 3.0 |
| **Military and Defense** | | | |
| 5. Armed conflict or threat of | 25.0 | 3.5 | 2.2 |
| 6. Peace moves, negotiations, settlements | 8.5 | 3.7 | 2.6 |
| 7. Other, including arms deals, weapons, bases exercises | 5.9 | 3.0 | 1.7 |
| **Economic Matters** | | | |
| 8. Agreements on trade, tariffs, etc. | 2.0 | 3.5 | 2.2 |
| 9. Other international trade, imports, exports | 4.6 | 3.5 | 4.8 |
| 10. Capital investment, stock issues (not aid) | 1.7 | 2.0 | 2.6 |
| 11. Stock exchange, share prices, dividends | 4.0 | 5.7 | 12.0 |

Table 5

| Topics of Wire Service Stories | Percent of stories from less developed countries (n = 303) | Percent of stories from more developed countries (n = 455) | Percent of stories from the U.S.A. (n = 231) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12. Other economics performance, output, growth, etc. | 0.3 | 3.3 | 5.2 |
| 13. Prices, cost of living, inflation, etc. | 3.0 | 3.3 | 3.9 |
| 14. Industrial projects, factories, dams, ports | 2.0 | 2.9 | 1.3 |
| 15. Agricultural matters, projects, crops, harvests, etc. | 1.0 | 1.5 | 3.9 |
| 16. Industrial/labor relations disputes, talks, wages | 1.0 | 1.5 | 1.7 |
| 17. Monetary questions, exchange rates, money supply | 3.3 | 9.0 | 2.6 |
| 18. Other economic | 1.0 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| International Aid | | | |
| 19. Disaster or famine relief | 5.3 | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| 20. Aid for economic purposes (e.g., industrial development) | 2.3 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| 21. Military aid, weapons, advisors, training | 3.3 | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| 22. Other aid (e.g., education, family planning) | 1.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| Social Services | | | |
| 23. Social problems generally (health, housing, illiteracy, etc.) | 1.0 | 1.1 | 0.8 |
| 24. Educational provision | 0.7 | 0.2 | 0.0 |

Table 5

| | Percent of stories from less developed countries (n = 303) | Percent of stories from more developed countries (n = 455) | Percent of stories from the U.S.A. (n = 231) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Topics of Wire Service Stories** | | | |
| 25. Health provision (not family planning) | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.4 |
| 26. Family planning | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.0 |
| 27. Other social services and social welfare | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| **Crime, Police, Judicial, Legal, Penal** | | | |
| 28. Non-political crime, police, judicial, and penal activity | 5.0 | 1.5 | 2.4 |
| 29. Political crime | 7.9 | 3.7 | 2.6 |
| 30. Non-criminal legal and court proceedings (e.g., claims for damages) | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| 31. Other crime/legal | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.8 |
| 32. Culture, Arts, Archaeology | 3.9 | 1.5 | 0.0 |
| 33. Religion | 5.0 | 2.2 | 0.0 |
| 34. Scientific, Technical, Medical | 6.6 | 4.2 | 7.3 |
| **Sports** | | | |
| 35. International | 2.6 | 35.6 | 6.9 |
| 36. Non-international | 0.6 | 4.6 | 31.0 |
| 37. Entertainment, Show Business (except personalities | 0.6 | 0.9 | 1.3 |

Table 5

| | Percent of stories from less developed countries (n = 303) | Percent of stories from more developed countries (n = 455) | Percent of stories from the U.S.A. (n = 231) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Topics of Wire Service Stories | | | |
| Personalities (not politicians) | | | |
| 38. Sports | 1.7 | 14.5 | 19.0 |
| 39. Entertainers | 0.6 | 1.8 | 0.2 |
| 40. Others | 1.7 | 1.8 | 0.4 |
| 41. Human Interest, Odd Happenings, Animals, Sex, etc. | 4.6 | 7.3 | 0.2 |
| 42. Student Matters | 1.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Ecology | | | |
| 43. Energy conservation | 3.3 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| 44. Pollution | 0.0 | 0.2 | 1.2 |
| 45. Other | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| 46. Natural Disaster (floods, etc. | 1.7 | 2.2 | 4.3 |
| 47. Other | 5.2 | 2.2 | 2.6 |